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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a historical overview regarding the nation state aspect of Norway because of its dramatic influence in curriculum making. The study examines aspects of the Norwegian national curriculum identity related to curriculum structure, to the underlying principles and consequent form those principles will take in the curriculum, and to the content of the curriculum in what students should know. These aspects are related to recent curriculum reform in Norway. The analysis is based on policy texts from the Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs as well as on current debate. The description focuses to a degree on related tensions and paradoxes found within the social and educational structures. Sections of the paper include: (1) "Introduction"; (2) "Establishing a National Identity in Curriculum"; (3) "Curriculum Structure and National Identity"; (4) "Formation (Bildung) and the Celebration of Principle and of Both-And"; (5) "Personal Identity-Nation State Identity"; and (6) "Concluding Comments." A 22-item reference list concludes the paper. (EH)

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Norwegian National Identity in Recent Curriculum Documents

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Introduction

Quite recently the Nordic Council of Ministers appointed a committee consisting of curriculum researchers representing each of the Nordic countries. The mandate was thought to be a simple one: to trace a common Nordic dimension in the curriculum of primary and lower secondary schooling. The task proved to be not so simple. And the report ended up just as an overview of where in the general curriculum and the curricula for school subjects in each country Nordic references are included or referred to without really a comparative analyses or trying to chase a common Nordic dimension (Nielsen 1997). The story signifies both the persuasiveness of the idea that a common Nordic dimension exists, and that comparisons even across the Nordic countries are difficult. Even within this geographic area, there are vast differences when it comes to dimensions of national culture that have influenced and still influence the school curriculum. And these differences are linked to the different facets of the history of the nation we belong to, and to its present state of affairs.

William Reid has in a most relevant (and brilliant) way outlined different aspects of the nature of national identity drawing on the curricula of upper secondary schooling in Germany, England and the US discerning between the «integrated», «alternative», and «optional» structure as well as a difference in process characterized as guided by principle, pragmatism and theory. The nation state relationship is most conspicuously illustrated by the respective national anthems. Not unexpected the Norwegian case is in many ways analogous with the German one - even so there are great differences. A short historical introduction seems necessary especially regarding the nation state aspect because it bears dramatically unto today's curriculum making.

Establishing a national identity in curriculum

In 1814 Norway had experienced more than 400 years of Danish rule only to find her national sovereignty restrained again, now by Sweden which ruled until 1905. The period from 1814 to 1905 witnessed a growing wave of national consciousness. The call for political, economic and cultural independence by the growing urban middle class was supported by a rural population who nourished a longrooted hatred of Danish influence and language. Feelings of nationalism inevitably affected decisions on the structure, contents and language of schooling. Thus, throughout the 19th century the question of classical culture or useful knowledge was debated with vigour. The peasants and the emerging urban middle class opposed the way upper secondary education was dominated by classical languages. They wanted these to be replaced by science, modern languages and the vernacular mother tongue. A merging of the Latin and science branches of state-financed secondary schools in 1848, the abolishment of the Latin composition as part of the "examen artium" in 1858, a revised teaching program for the

combined Latin and Science Schools in 1858, and the final elimination of Latin as the last classical language of upper secondary education in 1890, revolutionized the curriculum and structure of upper secondary education.

Linked to a growing awareness of national roots was a political undercurrent stressing freedom, equality and justice also for the nations' individual members. Such demands gradually evolved into political ideas which came to be universally accepted. Such ideas led to a shift of the Norwegian school system from one having parallel, but different levels into a unified system leaving Norway with probably the world's most democratic school system. In contrast to other European countries in the 1920s all children in Norway attended the same seven-year common school (Gundem 1993).

The development towards a unified educational system continued after the second world war. Compulsory schooling of 9 years' duration for all was established by the Educational Act of 1969. Through a revision of the Educational Act in 1975 handicapped children were also entitled to instruction offered in the compulsory school sector, with the purpose of integrating as far as possible all handicapped children into ordinary schools. The Act of 21 June 1974, put into practice in January 1976, concerning upper secondary schools, combined into one comprehensive system the traditional secondary schools preparing for the university studies and the wide range of vocational schools.

Jon Lauglo (1990, p. 72) maintains that in addition to socialist and democratic ideologies, a strong «populist» strain influenced the development of the Norwegian school system: «The élite is seen as alien, effete or exploitive. The good sense and rights of ordinary people are stressed. They are the carriers of national identity....» Thus, the foundations of a curriculum expressing who we want to become and mirroring the national identity sought for, are established, celebrating the cultural traditions and the vernacular language of the nation state, and egalitarian views and democratic values(cf Gundem 1993). In certain ways this has led to nationalistic/ chauvinistic undertones and also to the fallacy of «universalism» (Eisner & Vallance 1974) in curriculum development and curriculum decisions (cf Gundem 1996). It became e.g. important to adapt compulsory schooling to all pupils by minimizing the role of the intellectually difficult theoretic disciplines. Only a few years ago a proposal to remove mathematics from the last year of lower secondary education was seriously considered because it would make fewer students fail their final exams.

William Reid's assumptions as to a national identity related to the curriculum process itself discerning between the underlying rationale being either principle, pragmatism or theory-based seem to grasp essential features (cf Reid 1997, Gundem 1998). He is in this respect supported by David Hamilton who in a recent note (1997) adds another aspect. Hamilton maintains that English thought has great difficulty in reconciling *being and becoming*, because it does not accept *both-and* dialectical modes of thinking and praxis. Instead it has remained faithful to the either/or, subjective/objective dualism, (highlighted at the dawn of Absolutism,

by Descartes), and this has influenced curriculum making in important ways («what should they know» instead of «what should they become»?). Curriculum making in Norway being in the *Didaktik* tradition has from the last century on accepted *Bildung*, formation (danning) as the underlying principle and also a *both-and dialectic* trying to reconcile *being and becoming* especially, of course, in the rhetorics of curriculum documents.

In what follows we look at certain aspects of what we have described as a Norwegian national curriculum identity, related to *curriculum structure*, to the underlying *principles (what to strive to become/Bildung) and consequently form (both-and*, «what should they know» *and* «what should they become»?) and the *content of the curriculum*, what one should know. These aspects will be related to recent curriculum reform in our country. Our analysis is based on policy texts from the Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs[1] as well as on current debate. It will to a certain degree be focused on related tensions and paradoxes.

Curriculum structure and national identity

From what we depicted in the historical overview, it should be evident that the *national identity of curriculum structure* in Norway is the «integrated model» the way William Reid puts it.

The last reforms both of the school system as well as related to curriculum confirm the tendency to keep students together as long as possible and to have a common core of subject matter and avoid grading as long as possible. The Reform '94 was designed to provide a broader upper secondary education and has reduced the number of foundation courses offered from over a hundred to thirteen. The new foundation courses have a more general educational content, postponing specialisation to the level of advanced course.

The 1997 Curriculum Reform of compulsory schooling has increased the amount of common subject matters. This means that the opportunity for schools to chose locally orientated subject matters is less than before. Furthermore, the possibility for students to elect subjects has been reduced for lower secondary as well as for upper secondary education. The most important argument used by the politicians for these changes is that a unified educational system will secure social equality (NOU 1988) and develop, as they argue as very crucial in our complex society, a common pool of knowledge, culture and basis of values.

Even in higher education we find examples of a movement towards an integrated model. A new national common curriculum for all the social and health care programmes has been set which means that half a year out of three years are common for all. The argument in favour of this reform is not the question of equality, but the importance of interdisciplinarity and collaboration between professionals.

Formation (*Bildung*) and the celebration of *principle* and of *both-and*

A most obvious and marked characteristic of the recent curriculum reform in Norway is that it implies coherence along school types within the school system. The means to accomplish this is first and foremost a common core curriculum or a type of nationally mandated curriculum guideline which is in fact a general policy curriculum document for primary, secondary and adult education alike - called a core curriculum - "core" used in a special way - denoting underlying *principles and aims* meant to be common to all schools as defined by central bodies and not a common core of factual knowledge and skills to be mastered by everyone. In many ways this new core curriculum is at the heart of the curriculum reform - it is to put it differently the "raison d'être" of the reform (Gundem 1996). It signifies an understanding of schooling embedded in the Didaktik tradition adopted by the nation states of continental Europe as part of the national identity in the curriculum. In Rudolf Künzli's words:

> The Didaktiker does not begin by asking how a student learns, how a pupil can be led towards a body of knowledge, nor does he or she ask what a student should be able to do or know, but instead asks wherein the character-forming significance of the knowledge and skills lies which a culture has at its disposal. He then interprets his subject, defines the practicable way of instruction, the principal contexts and connections. If you want to express the central didactic ideas in one short formula you could put it this way: The Didaktiker places all his work under the overarching question why the student is learning what he does learn. And it is of no worth teaching or learning any subject if it not at least in a traceable indirect connection can be said that it is for the sake of formation (*Bildung*). The Didaktiker looks first for the point of prospective object of learning in terms of education/formation (*Bildung*), asks what it can and should signify to the student, and how students themselves can experience this significance. (Künzli 1994 p.6)

In order to safeguard the «established» national identity of the curriculum and at the same time prepare for a curriculum renewal in the light of today's national and international society (cf. «risk society perspectives»), there has been an explicit endeavour to link the essence and spirit of different Education Acts, and of recent white papers related to educational matters directly to the core curriculum and at the same time safeguarding the imbedded messages of former curriculum guidelines (and consequently the national identity in the curriculum). This has resulted on one side in a presentation of *overarching principles* as well as of aims defined as a) something to work towards and as b) something one can know whether one approaches or not. And, on the other side, presenting the contents of the core curriculum under the following headings: The *spiritual human being*, the *creative human being*, the *working human being*, the *liberally-educated human being*, the *social human being*, the *environmentally aware human being*, and the *integrated human being*.

This common part of the curriculum constitutes the binding basis of compulsory as well as upper secondary schooling (KUF 1994a, Preface). And consequently, the curriculum

guideline or syllabus for each school subject must be in accordance with these overarching principles and aims laid down in the core curriculum not only as rhetorics, but as an integrated and integrating element of the subject syllabuses. To give and example: All school subjects has aesthetic and ethical dimensions which should be revealed and highlighted.

In order just to illustrate the *both-and* perspective, we will confine ourselves to a description of what is implied by the integrated human being linked to a national identity in the curriculum, as well as pointing to certain inherent dilemmas and paradoxes.

The point of departure is that education has a number of seemingly contradictory aims. And what especially characterizes the integrated human being is that in her or him these seemingly contradictory aims are attained. We will just give some examples:

> - to convey our culture's moral commonality, with its concern for others - *and* to foster the ability to plot one's own course;
> - to provide familiarity with our Christian and humanistic heritage - *and* knowledge of and respect for other religions and faiths;
> - to develop independent and autonomous personalities - *and* the ability to function and work as a team;
> - to allow space for the ways and wont of the young - *and* fit them to join in and take on responsibility in the adult world;
> - to furnish skills for work and the practical tasks of life - *and* provide room for emotional and character growth;
> - to provide enough facts to be able to fathom and follow current affairs - *and* convey values that can guide the choices that new knowledge opens the way for;
> - to provide powerful exposure to the greatest achievements in literature and art, in work, adventure and research - *and* give each individual the opportunity to discover and develop the germs that lie in his or hers own powers;
> - to provide the young with a solid foundation of knowledge - *and* mold it in such a way that it impels to inquiry and the quest for new knowledge throughout life;
> - to teach pupils to utilize nature and the forces of nature for human purposes - *and* to teach them to protect the environment against human folly and encroachment.
> (KUF 1994a, pp. 39-40)

It is underlined that education must balance these dual aims. The object is an all-round development of abilities and distinctive qualities: to conduct oneself morally, to create and to act, to work with others and in harmony with nature.

It is also pointed out that when greater knowledge gives greater power, more stress must be put on the responsibility that accompanies the power, and that the choices to be made must be based on awareness of consequences and connections, but also guided by probing against values. It is strongly underlined that a distinct precept of education must be to combine greater knowledge, know-how and skills with social awareness, ethical orientation and aesthetic sensibility. The young must be integrated both personally and in social life in a morally coherent way. It is argued that education shall promote ethical and critical responsibility in the young for the society and the world they live in (KUF 1994, p. 40). The need of balance is also explicit in the ultimate aim of education: «The ultimate aim of education is to inspire individuals to realize their potential in ways that serve the common

good, to nurture humaneness in a society in development» (KUF 1994, p. 40).

Wolfgang Klafki (1998) describes in his critical-constructive didactic three elements which «Bildung» is to promote: self-determination, co-determination and solidarity. To compare Klafki's concept of «Bildung» and the Norewegian Core Curriculum is a bit simplistic. Nevertheless, we would argue that the last chapter of the core curriculum describing the integrated human being, presents an open curriculum perspective which demands didactical reflection among teachers concerning «Bildung» and the balance between the inner and outer world. But does this perspective characterize the rest of the curriculum and strategies in use for implementing the curriculum? We will return to this question in the next paragraph.

Personal identity - nation state identity

Regarding national identity in the curriculum and the question of content, we start by drawing attention to a point also raised by William Reid: *the nation state as the focus of individual identity*, and the insistence on *knowing* related to this. We will especially look at three aspects of individual identity: personal development, democratic-social development and multicultural understanding, and the way recent curriculum documents highlight national identity and knowing related to these aspects.

In relation to the personal development of the individual citizen the cultural heritage is considered as an important source in especially two respects. On the one side: it is argued that the development of *personal* identity occurs through becoming familiar with inherited forms of conduct, norms of behaviour and modes of expression. The curriculum should consequently elaborate and deepen the learner's familiarity with national and local traditions. The bonds between generations will further be closer when they share experiences and insights, stories, songs and legends.

On the other side: the curriculum must play a leading role in passing on the common heritage, the culture all must be familiar with if society is to remain *democratic*. The link between the maintenance of democracy and cultural heritage and a common knowledge base is further elaborated by stressing a common national subject matter. There has been a strong political will to extend and widen the common national subject matter as the pupils move upwards through the different grades and this common national syllabus is meant to be clearly specified for the different subjects (KUF 1994b). This may seem a paradox related to a democratic development of school and society because it clearly diminishes the role of the teachers and the students in deciding what to teach and learn. The main arguments, however , are related to the question of *equity and equal rights* and to a more subtle line of thinking: In an increasingly specialized society common frame of references must be the property of all people to escape differences in competence that may otherwise surface into *social inequality*

and be as it is expressed " abused by undemocratic forces". (This last hint relates the way we see it, to political, religious as well as ideological fundamentalism). It is argued that those who do not share the background information taken for granted in public discourse, will often overlook the points in question and miss the meaning (Gundem 1996).

Examples given of common contexts as references for understanding encompass e.g historical events, constitutional principles, the classics of literature and the symbols used on weather charts. Without this overarching comprehension it is argued that it will be difficult for non-specialists to participate in decisions that affect their lives underlining the fact that the more specialized and technological our culture becomes, the more difficult it will be to communicate across professional boundaries (KUF 1994a, pp.26-27).[2]

It is further underscored that *newcomers* to the country are more easily incorporated into our society when implicit features of *our cultural heritage are made clear and exposed to view*, like knowledge about past events and achievements (Gundem 1996). The tensions and dilemmas are evident. On the one side it is maintained that our domestic history and distinctive features are our contribution to the cultural diversity of the world. Our cultural heritage must therefore be central as an integral part of the mandated curriculum. On the other side the school system embraces many pupils from groups which in our country constitute minority cultures and languages. The curriculum must therefore, according to the political intentions, convey knowledge of other cultures and take advantage of the potential for enrichment that minority groups and Norwegians with another cultural heritage represent.

In the subject specific part of the last curriculum guidelines for compulsory education (M 87) there is a chapter about the mother tongue for language minority groups. The fundamental principle for the syllabus in the mother tongue is the need to provide well-organized teaching in the mother tongue for all students, and is closely connected to the objective of making the pupils *functionally bilingual*. It is stated that «Children who grow up in a bilingual situation need to develop both languages through their education, and use them throughout their lives» (M 87, p. 196). Nevertheless, at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the question about mother tongue education for language minority groups became a controversial theme (Øzerk, 1997). A consequence of this conflict is that there is no mother tongue for language minorities syllabus in the new curriculum. Kamil Øzerk characterises the change as at shift from a «paradigm of inclusion» to a «paradigm of exclusion» and he stresses that language minority groups have become invisible in the new curriculum.

Regarding the Sami society, however, there is a general understanding that its ethnic and cultural diversity must be visible in the school curriculum. Sami language and culture are part of a common heritage. Aspects of Sami traditional culture should consequently be introduced in the school subjects like music (the «joik»), sports (throwing the «lasso»), and natural science (e.g. the balance of the ecosystem related to reindeer keeping).

What we see as a paradox in the Core Curriculum regarding multicultural understanding is that the main terms of reference for cultural heritage in the curriculum are Christian and western humanistic values - and that it may look like the schools are expected to inculcate a religious and humanistic- based monoculture at a time when the need to create scope for pluralism seems evident (cp. Englund 1994). And further: a main impression derived from the curriculum texts is that the ideal is that the non-Norwegian speaking pupil "grows into" the Norwegian society in every sense. In order to illustrate the emphasis within the curriculum documents on the common cultural heritage and Christian values we would give two examples, the subject syllabuses for *Arts and Crafts* and *Religious Knowledge and Ethical Education*.

The subject syllabus for Arts and Crafts indicates a movement towards an increased emphasis on the masters of art in the history of the western world. The inherent meaning of the original denotation of the subject «forming» was creative expression. The new name of the subject «Arts and Crafts» implies a development from everyday activities to more stress on the nature of the subject matter. In the 1987 syllabus no artists are mentioned by name. In the 1997 syllabus a great quantity of names are mentioned. The pupils should learn about Edvard Munch, Christian Krog, Theodor Kittelsen, Gustav Vigeland as well as Pablo Picasso, Henrie Matisse, Vincent Van Gogh and Leonardo da Vinci to mention a few. One important aim of the school subject is to create a common cultural frame of reference. The syllabus underlines both the national craft traditions and the western art traditions. No artists from the third world are, however, mentioned nor is a description of the political role of arts within the history given.

It is symptomatic that the curriculum guidelines for *Religious Knowledge and Ethical Education* has been made compulsory for all pupils. The Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs argued that since the religious and cultural diversity of Norwegian society becomes increasingly more complex, the more important it is that pupils can meet, regardless of their faith and conviction, when they are working with related topics, such as respect and tolerance. The aims and principles which constitute the basis of the subject's curriculum are as follow:

- Provide thorough knowledge of the Bible and the Christian faith and their contribution to our cultural heritage and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church
- Familiarize pupils with other Christian churches
- Provide knowledge about other world religions and faiths, as well as topics within ethics and philosophy
- Promote understanding and respect towards Christian and humanistic values
- Further understanding, respect and capacity for communication between people of different religious and ethical convictions
- Become a regularly offered school-subject, with knowledge, discovery, ability and attitudes as primary goals
- Provide an atmosphere for information, not proclamation, offer learning, not instruction, in one particular faith
- Be unbiased, and convey insight, respect and communication despite religious and ethical differences (KUF 1997)

The main argument however is the need for a common religious «literacy» for all Norwegian people notwithstanding ethnic, religious and cultural background. This has, of course, enhailed a storm of debate and protest especially on the part of the Muslims, Jews and agnostics - who have literally joined forces in forming together a protest organization. Adding to the heated discussion is the fact that an application for state grant support for a Muslim School under the Norwegian Education Act is repeatedly rejected by the Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs. Among the loud voices of critique we select Lars Løvlie, an Oslo University professor:

> We are used to think of the past 250 yeas - what we call modernity - in terms of Enlightenment rationality, more specifically as the proud realisation of a scientific spirit which shattered superstition and prejudice, of a humanity which tolerated differences in race, religion and ethnic background, and of an idea of justice which makes all individuals equal under the law. The most obvious paradox is of course that the explisit re-affirmation of the European tradition and of national culture under the present political conditions proceeds by an actual emptying of such terms as freedom responsibility and solidarity.... The humanistic, universalistic and liberal tradition of modernity is now replaced by ethnocentricism, difference and particularity. (Løvlie 1998, pp.xx)

The national identity in the curriculum also relates to a common and *shared nation state identity* confronting the flow of internationalization. It is maintained that a growing internationalization and influences from the global community demand heightened awareness of own traditions and values, and that the increasing specialization and complexity of the global community requires a deepened familiarity with the main currents and traditional tones of the national culture. The expansion of knowledge demands heightened awareness of the values that must guide the choices of the individual person. A main point is that when transitions are massive and changes rapid it becomes even more pressing to emphasize historical orientation, national distinctiveness and local variation to safeguard the nation state identity. It is also a point raised that our contribution to the global community relates to tradition in specific ways (KUF.1994a pp. 28-29).

It is, according to our view, a paradox that internationalization to such a great extent is seen in relation to tradition and not in view of a future vision or at least in a future perspective, and that the answer to our existential societal and global problems lies to such a great extent in the virtues of the past and in our national heritage. In a report dealing with the lack of global perspectives related especially to the "third world" in the new 1994-syllabus for the upper secondary school, it is argued that this may derive from the new general core curriculum where concepts like our inherited common culture and traditions are repeatedly mentioned without drawing a connecting line to other countries and cultures and without revealing the negative sides of our own culture and traditons. The report concludes that the

result is a chauvinistic world view (Nordkvelle 1993).

The sociologist Ulrich Beck (1992) describes society as a «risk society». Unlike in an earlier modernity, no one can be held accountable for the hazards of the risk society. A risk society has been developed through two fundamental transformations: the end of nature and the end of tradition. Risk society is a «society where we increasingly live on a high technological frontier which absolutely no one completely understands and which generates a diversity of possible futures» (Giddens 1998. p. 25). Individualization is one significant feature of a risk society. «The individual himself or herself becomes the reproduction unit of the social in the lifeworld (Beck 1992. p. 90).

Along different. but in some sense connected lines William Doll (1993) argues in favour of a post-modern curriculum which is tentative and open for multiple interpretations. uncertainty, variance and indeterminacy.

A question to ask is whether or not the recent curriculum reforms in Norway acknowledge these perspectives or is trapped in the concept of modernization. Although the curriculum guidelines recognise the complexity according to values within the society. it seems however that the overreaching aim of the reforms is to secure a common cultural heritage in the interests of social cohesion and to provide a secure backdrop to social. economic and political life. This strategy may be seen as what Jane Franklin (1998. p. 2) calls «the politics of nostalgic community».

Concluding comments

In this paper we have focused on three aspects of the curriculum: the structure of the curriculum. the underlying principles. and the content presented through school subjects.

The nexus between national state identity and personal identity makes an interesting point of departure discussing the history of curriculum-making in Norway and the overreaching principles in recent curriculum reforms. When analysing the curriculum documents it seems clear that an underlying assumption is that personal identity develops through a common base of knowledge. culture and values. In other words: through socialization into a national state identity. This perspective relies on a monocultural ideal of the society. Although it admits that the society is complex and plural. the educational system should stress unification and simplicity.

This. mostly covert. but underlying perspective has consequences for the role of the teacher. The teacher becomes more an agent implementing the curriculum on behalf of the state than a teacher as a didaktiker that «looks first for the point of prospective object of learning in terms of education/formation (*Bildung*), asks what it can and should signify to the student. and how students themselves can experience this significance».(Künzli 1994 p.6)

Another issue which is important to discuss is the curriculum related to the question of inclusion and exclusion. As mentioned above. Ozerk (1997) uses these concepts in

connection with mother tongue education for minority groups in Norway. It becomes a paradox that although social equality and inclusion are main principles in the educational history in Norway and the recent curriculum reforms can be read as a strategy for equality, there is a hazard that it turns out as a strategy for inequality and exclusion.

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Notes

1. Please note that we refer to versions translated into English: *Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education*, 1994 and *Principles and Guidelines for the Structure, Organization and Content of the 10-Year Compulsory school*, Draft version 1994.(The last one is an English translation of main points in Report to the Parliament (St. Meld) no 29 (1994-1995).

2. Expressed in terms of policy:

"Common background knowledge is thus at the core of a national network of communications between members of a democratic society. It is the common frames of reference which make it possible to link what one sees, reads to a shared tacit mode of thinking. It makes it possible to fathom complex messages and to interprete new ideas, situations and challenges." (KUF 1994a p.26-27)